



# Culturally Energizing, Global Social Recognition

A CASE STUDY

workhuman\*

## Customer spotlight

With a 125-year history of working to make a difference, Merck is a premier research-intensive biopharmaceutical company with a mission to save and improve lives. Its 67,000 employees around the world provide medicines and vaccines for many of the world's most challenging diseases.

Whether helping invent the next breakthrough treatment or simply challenging and supporting one another for mutual betterment, Merck's culture is all about applied curiosity. Underpinning that culture are Merck's core values of patients first, respect for people, ethics and integrity, and innovation and scientific excellence.

This case study explores how Merck partnered with Workhuman® to implement a modern recognition and reward solution that boosts employee retention and engagement and improves key diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) metrics.



A photograph of two scientists in a laboratory setting. On the left, a woman with glasses and a blue surgical mask is using a pipette. On the right, a man with a blue surgical mask is looking down at a piece of paper. Both are wearing white lab coats and blue gloves. The background is a blurred laboratory with various equipment and containers.

# The challenge

The existing recognition experience at Merck did not match the needs of a modern workforce. Recognition was not peer-to-peer – it could only be given top-down, from manager to employee – and only reached 22% of the workforce. And since the nomination process was paper-based, no one was recognized in real time, in the moments it mattered most.



## **Service anniversary program needs**

“Our vendor did not have local distribution centers, so we were dealing with tax and customs issues,” explains Dave Watson, global solutions and relationship lead at Merck. “Many times, people didn’t get their award for months after their anniversary.”

**The bottom line? Merck wanted a consistent global program to deliver a similar experience to employees in different parts of the world.**

Merck needed a partner to help build a global recognition solution that would allow employees to recognize each other quickly, easily, and frequently.

A photograph of two scientists, a woman with blonde hair and a man with dark skin, both wearing white lab coats and clear safety goggles. They are looking down at a tablet computer held by the man. The background is a blurred laboratory setting with shelves and equipment.

## The solution

Merck chose to partner with Workhuman to launch its first peer-to-peer recognition program called INSPIRE. The program was launched globally in 85 countries on one day.

Helping launch INSPIRE were more than 400 ambassadors and early adopters around the world, tailoring launch events to their countries and cultures.

Workhuman's platform allowed Merck to improve every aspect of the recognition process, making it easier for employees to both give points and recognize each other, as well as redeem points for gift cards and merchandise in every country.

Since INSPIRE is far-reaching, with a recognition moment happening every 23 seconds, the program was well positioned to support Merck's DE&I efforts through two industry-first, built-in micro-coaching opportunities: Inclusion Reflections and Inclusion Advisor. Inclusion Reflections nudges employees in the process of nominating a peer for an award, asking questions like: Are you recognizing the right individuals? Are you recognizing individuals equitably? Inclusion Advisor is a smart assistant that provides in-the-moment micro-coaching to flag potentially biased language in award messages.


Workhuman came to Merck with an innovative solution that allowed Merck to further advance its program in the digital space and make its recognition program more user-friendly.

**At Merck, a  
recognition moment  
happens every  
23 seconds.**



INSPIRE platform





## The result

Excitement for INSPIRE has only grown since the program launched. There have been nearly three million recognition moments, with 37% of those between peers and 100% of the population recognized at least once. Merck has also seen impressive adoption of the INSPIRE mobile application, with 84,000 mobile recognition actions.

INSPIRE has exceeded Merck's expectations for a more user-friendly recognition experience. "We don't have any training materials on how to use INSPIRE," says Watson. "The system is extremely intuitive. It takes two minutes to recognize somebody."

The ease of use means people are being recognized more frequently. "That builds a positive energy in the organization, which you just don't get with the infrequent cash awards," says Watson.

**100% recognition reach**

**3M recognition moments**

**37% peer-to-peer**





# 12pt

increase on the recognition question in  
Merck's employee engagement survey

# 5x

Recognized new hires are 5x less likely to  
leave within their first year

# 1.3x

lower turnover for employees who receive  
a monthly INSPIRE award

# 100%

of the workforce recognized for living  
Merck's values



## **Boosting engagement**

Another tangible result of INSPIRE is a 12-point increase on the recognition question in Merck's employee engagement survey. Today, a majority of Merck employees say they have a positive recognition experience, which is a significant change from years prior to the launch of INSPIRE. Seeing this positive impact, Merck chose to increase investment in INSPIRE to create the best possible recognition and reward experience for employees and lean into this effective tool that drives culture, retention, engagement, DE&I and connections.

## **Fostering inclusion**

The micro-coaching features embedded in INSPIRE are also making a difference when it comes to DE&I. Seventy-four percent of employees chose to change their recognition message after Inclusion Advisor flagged potentially biased language. And employee surveys indicate these nudges are changing behavior in a positive way, even in settings beyond recognition.



Dave Watson says,

**"All of our line  
division leaders say  
HR should be doing  
more things like this."**

**The business rarely talks about HR that way, but  
they're talking about INSPIRE that way all the time."**



**To learn how recognition can drive  
retention and engagement at your  
company, get in touch.**

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Or read more on our blog: [workhuman.com/resources](https://workhuman.com/resources)

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